



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Macedonian Municipal Elections, March 13, 2005

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 17, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States concurs with ODIHR's preliminary assessment of the first round of municipal elections on March 13. We note that the elections proceeded calmly and in a professional manner and that they complied with most OSCE commitments for elections. Macedonia's voters should take particular pride in the fact that voting in most municipalities remained largely relaxed and violence free.

On the other hand, the United States also agrees with ODIHR's assessment that Macedonia failed to meet key commitments to guarantee universal and equal suffrage and to ensure the secrecy of the ballot. Irregularities were noted by our own Embassy and other international observers, for instance, included numerous cases of family and proxy voting, open and group voting, ballot-stuffing, stolen ballot papers and ballot boxes, unsigned voter lists, and voter intimidation. Other problems include pro-government media bias in public broadcasts and State Election Commission appointment procedures which were inconsistent with the principle of an independent judiciary.

Elections that meet international standards, we all know, are an important criterion on Macedonia's path toward euro-Atlantic integration, and we call on Macedonian authorities to investigate and prosecute vigorously any breaches of law during the polling and, before the second round of polling is held on March 27, in order to remedy the serious and persistent problems that have marred the voting in some areas.

We expect any official complaints or appeals by citizens or parties to be handled transparently and in accordance with Macedonian law.

And in this vein, we expect that the responsible authorities will ensure that the final results for the Skopje mayoral election, to be announced in the coming days, will be arrived at in a process that is fair, transparent, credible, and verifiable. We call on the responsible authorities to fully consider and investigate appeals regarding the electoral process in Skopje, and in any other municipalities where appeals are made, assuming of course that they are made in a timely manner.

Lastly, Mr. Chairman, the United States would like to commend ODIHR's Head of Mission and his team for their excellent work in organizing the election observation mission.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.